Epic gets Mardi Gras concessions

By JACK STENGLER
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GALVESTON — The City Council approved an ordinance and contract Thursday giving Epic Restaurants of Houston exclusive concessionaire rights for part of the downtown area during the 1989 Mardi Gras.

The firm will have the exclusive right for the area which is behind a fence, for which an entry fee is charged and where most of the event's entertainment is held.

Amendments to the original proposal stipulate that Epic will pay the city half all concession permit fees it receives daily until Jan. 13, when the entire $63,000 promised the city for this right is due.

The firm cannot require the exclusive sale of any one product in the area. Concessions under control of the firm will sell food and beverages, and novelties.

Councilman Steve Greenberg opposed the measures because he says they exclude small local businesses from Mardi Gras because of booth prices, and usurps private property rights by controls on concessions on private property.

Greenberg said he recently heard the boundaries of the enclosed area are to be expanded from Mechanic Street to Market Street.

He said this should have been brought up long ago because it is a council decision and no new area can be blocked off because city ordinances requires surrounding property owners be notified.

Greenberg, chairman of the Park Board of Trustees Mardi Gras committee, said some actions connected with the 1989 event have circumvented this committee, the Park Board and council.

Councilman Pat Hartnett said he believes the Park Board dropped the ball in setting up the 1989 event and did not come to the council with some items it should have.

Greenberg voted against the exclusive concessionaire ordinance and contract.

Voting for the ordinance were Mayor Jan Coggeshall, Mayor Pro Tem Don Brooks, and Council Members Barbara Crews, Sonny Nelson and Hartnett.

The vote for the contract was the same, except the mayor had left the meeting.

In other action council approved a recommendation from City Manager Doug Matthews that the city take control of The Pirates municipal golf course.

Matthews recommended this move because of the problems involved in financing the proposed $1.6 million in improvements at the facility, and a need to begin construction in early January or delay the project a year.

"I feel that given the opportunity to work on this project as a city department will eliminate a lot of the confusion, and make more accountable and responsive," the city manager said.

"Also, I feel that if this is going to be called a municipal golf course then it should be run by the city, with a golf course commission, appointed by the council," he said.

Matthews also was critical of criticism of him and city staff members in regard to the delays in getting finances for the improvements in place.

This recommendation was supported by representatives of the Galveston County Golf Association and Galveston Island Golfers Association.

The council also approved setting up a Galveston Royalty Donation Fund where, small mineral royalties, not wanted by the people to whom they are owed, could be used for parks, work along Seawall Boulevard, Broadway beautification and the Emergency Medical Service.

It is expected the city will receive approximately $50,000 a year in this fund and is to divide it equally between the four areas.